



# Records Management Procedures Manual

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*Fort Bend County Texas*

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Prepared By:  
The Fort Bend County Records Management Committee

## OVERVIEW

NOTE: Links to the County's Records Policy and to Forms referred to in this document are found on the Records Management link on the home page of the County's INTRANET (econnect) site.<sup>1</sup>

### Background

State law governing county government records in Texas is addressed by the Local Government Records Act of 1989 (Chapters 201-205, Local Government Code). The Texas State Library and Archives Commission, State and Local Records Management Division, interprets provisions of the Act and provides records management guidance and education to local governments.

Fort Bend County Commissioners' Court adopted a records policy in 1992 and revised and expanded the policy in 2008.<sup>2</sup> The county records management program for non-elected departments and participating elected departments follows the policy. The program is implemented by the county's Records Management Officer (RMO) in cooperation with a five-member Records Management Committee. Each participant department designates a Records Liaison Officer (RLO) who maintains the departmental records process.

**Defining a record, record series, and records control schedule:** A **record** includes any document, paper, letter, book, map, photograph, sound or video recording, microfilm, magnetic tape, electronic media, or other information recording media, regardless of physical form or characteristic, created or received by the County or any of its departments pursuant to law or in the transaction of public business. A **record series** is any group of related records that are filed and used as a unit and may be disposed of as a unit (i.e., agendas, minutes, contracts, budgets and budget documentation, etc.). A **records control schedule** is a document prepared by or under the authority of the RMO listing the records maintained by a department, their retention periods, and other records disposition information that the records management program may require.

**Government records are public property.** Destruction of local government records contrary to the provisions of the Local Government Records Act and administrative rules adopted under its authority is a Class A misdemeanor and, under certain circumstances, a third degree felony (Penal Code, Section 37.10). Anyone destroying local government records without legal authorization may also be subject to criminal penalties and fines under the Public Information Act (Government Code, Chapter 552).

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<sup>1</sup> <http://econnect/index.aspx>

<sup>2</sup> [Fort Bend County Records Management Policy](#)

## Life of a Record

1) **A record is created or received.** The department's RLO identifies what records series the record belongs to and the record becomes part of the department's inventory. If the record is unrelated to the existing records maintained by the department, the RLO completes an inventory and analysis creating a new record series and adds the new record series to the department's records control schedule.

2) **The record becomes active.** Once created or received, the new record becomes active. A record is active during the period it is opened, amended, added to or consulted, regularly and/or repeatedly.

3) **The record becomes inactive.** A record becomes inactive when the department determines the record is no longer regularly used. The record may be removed to a less convenient location so that new and remaining active records are more accessible. **The RLO shall consult with the County's RMO before having records removed to a location outside the department.** If the inactive records series format is hard copy (paper), the RLO may consider capturing the data electronically (medium- to long-term retention) or photographically (permanent retention). Once the change in format is completed, the data in its previous format may be disposed of without formal authorization.

4) **The record is destroyed.** A record shall be destroyed only in accordance with the department's record control schedule. When the record is eligible for destruction, the RLO completes a Request to Destroy Scheduled Records Form<sup>3</sup> and submits it to the RMO for approval. Upon approval, the department is authorized to destroy the record. Upon destruction, the RLO shall submit to the RMO a completed *Destruction Request/Attestation* form.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> [Request to Destroy Scheduled Records](#)

<sup>4</sup> Destruction Request/Attestation

## **Part I: A Record is Created or Received**

I. **Identification.** When a record is created or received, the department determines what record series the record belongs to. Existing records series are identified in the department's records control schedule. If the record is unrelated to the existing records maintained by the department, the department should complete an Inventory & Analysis Excel Spreadsheet<sup>5</sup> to create a new record series and add the new record series to the department's records control schedule.

II. **Record Copies.** While a department's holdings may include other categories of records, the department is legally accountable only for its official records. The term used by the Texas State Library and Archives Commission for an official record is "record copy."

III. **Transitory Records.** Transitory records (drafts, convenience copies, etc.) are not essential to the fulfillment of statutory obligations or to the documentation of government functions, and may be disposed of without going through the County's records destruction procedures. However, transitory records that may contain sensitive or confidential data should be disposed of in accordance with the Local Government Records Act of 1989.

IV. **Format.** From the standpoint of status (record copy versus transitory) and content, records are the same regardless of format - hard copy, microform, electronic, digital or voice.

V. **Amending a Records Control Schedule.** It is expected that changes to departmental records control schedules will be necessary to comply with changes in legal, regulatory, and operation requirements. Departments shall submit proposed changes to the RMO, who will review the changes and submit the changes to the County Records Management Committee for review and approval.

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<sup>5</sup> [Records Inventory & Analysis Excel Spreadsheet](#)

## **Part II: The Record Becomes Active**

I. **Active Records.** Once a record is created or received, the record becomes active. A record is active during the period it is opened, amended, added to or consulted, regularly and/or repeatedly.

II. **Storage.** Active records related to current or ongoing activities that are referred to on a regular basis should be stored primarily in onsite records storage facilities (i.e., filing cabinets, office computers, etc.). Due to expense of and time required for retrieval, offsite storage facilities should be reserved for inactive records.

III. **Access to Records.** Each department head should designate which employees may access what departmental records, whether stored onsite or offsite.

IV. **Records Security and Confidentiality.** To secure the records of the County and ensure that information is protected, the following “best practices” should be followed:

- a. Keep records in storage appropriate to their format and classification. See that records classified as sensitive for operational or personal reasons are secured in a locked file cabinet or room or system with controlled access.
- b. Protect any papers, files, printouts, or removable media (e.g., optical disk, CD, DVD, USB drives, etc.) containing county information or any sensitive internal information by storing the records in safe and secure locations.
- c. Protect electronic records by storing the records on network drives that are secured with access passwords.
- d. Clear all whiteboards and flip charts of any confidential information after meetings or at the end of the day, as appropriate.
- e. Log out of all PCs and shut down all Internet connections at the end of the business day.

V. **Exiting Employees.** Each department should appropriately manage any exiting employee’s working records. The department may seek guidance from the RMO if desired. Records should be managed as follows:

- a. Determine which records are transitory and which qualify as official records.
- b. Destroy transitory records.
- c. Maintain official records in accordance with department Records Control Schedule.

## **Part III: The Record Becomes Inactive**

I. **Inactive Records.** A record becomes inactive when the department determines the record is no longer regularly used. The record may be removed to a less convenient location so that new and remaining active records are more accessible.

II. **Records Clean-Up.** Each department should schedule and implement a cleanup program for onsite records in order to ensure appropriate usage of office and server space. The department must determine the following:

- a. Which transitory records have outlived their original purpose and may be destroyed;
- b. Which inactive official records can be retained onsite;
- c. Which inactive official records should be transferred to offsite storage;
- d. Which inactive official records are due for immediate destruction review in accordance with the department's records control schedule.

III. **Purging Onsite Records.** Each department should follow these steps to purge records in its work areas:

- a. Remove and dispose of any transitory records or non-record material no longer in use.
- b. Remove inactive records and process as follows:
  - i. Set aside any historical records and flag these records for archival consideration.
  - ii. Identify records eligible for destruction under the department records control schedule (i.e., have met or exceeded the applicable retention period). Follow the destruction procedures set forth in Part IV.
  - iii. Pack remaining inactive records in paper format within cartons to be sent to offsite storage.
  - iv. Contact RMO regarding proper archival of records in electronic format.
- c. Databases and system applications will be purged systematically by departments based on each department's records control schedule.

**IV. Offsite Storage.** Departments should use only approved offsite storage locations to store County records. Approved offsite storage locations include the County's current third-party vendor and the Fort Bend County Records Center. Offsite storage should be used to store inactive official records.

a. **Cartons.** Departments should only utilize 10x12x15 inch banker's boxes with crush proof lids for offsite storage. When packing records, departments should:

- i. Organize file groups by age or date whenever possible. If a carton contains records with a range of ages, identify the age of the most recent record to ensure that no record is destroyed before the end of its retention period.
- ii. Pack letter-sized documents in the same direction and facing the end of the carton to be labeled.
- iii. Pack legal-sized documents in the same direction and facing the long side of the carton.
- iv. Do not over pack the carton. Leave approximately an inch and a half of free space behind the last file.
- v. If a carton cannot be packed to 90% capacity, combine those files with files in another carton, keep the files onsite until the carton is full, or fill the empty space with waste paper.
- vi. Number each carton sequentially, using the (pre-Lawson) two-digit department number as a prefix (e.g., 78-0001, 78-0002, 78-0003, etc.).
- vii. Mark each carton with the applicable record codes (from the Records Control Schedule), the date range of the records, and the applicable destruction date. A short description of the contents is helpful.

b. **Retrieval.**

- i. The Fort Bend County Records Center is a self-serve facility. Departments should contact the Records Management Department to arrange access to records. Personnel retrieving records will be required to sign in and out.
- ii. Pickup from third party vendors must be arranged through the Records Management Department.

**V. Purging Offsite Records.** Each department should follow these steps to purge records in offsite storage:

- a. Maintain current lists of all records maintained in offsite storage.
- b. Regularly review lists to identify records eligible for destruction under the department records control schedule (i.e., have met or exceeded the applicable retention period).
  - i. Retrieve records eligible for destruction on a scheduled basis and follow the destruction procedures set forth in Part IV to dispose of the records.

**VI. Historical Records.** The Records Management Policy calls for the permanent retention and preservation of some records because of their continuing value to the County and of any court record created prior to January 1, 1951. These records must be identified and managed as directed by the RMO. The RMO will work with departments to:

- a. Identify records of continuing value to the County;
- b. Define preservation requirements and identify appropriate storage;
- c. Track inventory and manage access;
- d. Arrange for transfer to any future County archives.



## Part IV: The Record is Destroyed

I. **Destruction Eligibility.** A record shall be destroyed in accordance with the department's record control schedule unless there is a legitimate business or legal reason to postpone destruction.

II. **Initiating Destruction.** When a record is eligible for destruction, the department shall complete a *Request to Destroy Scheduled Records* form<sup>6</sup> and submit the form to the RMO for approval. Once the Request is approved, signed, and returned to the department, the department may destroy the records.

III. **Internal Destruction.** The department may destroy the records internally. Upon destruction, the department shall submit to the RMO a completed *Destruction Request/Attestation* form.<sup>7</sup>

### IV. Destruction Assistance.

- a. **Shredding.** The department may request destruction assistance by submitting a *Destruction Request/Attestation* form to the RMO. The records will be picked up from the department by the Recycling Center and the *Destruction Request/Attestation* form will be signed and returned to the department after destruction. Upon receipt of the signed Destruction Request form, the department shall submit to the RMO a copy of the signed form.
- b. **Other.** The department shall contact the Records Management Department for destruction of records on microfilm, x-rays, audio tapes, plastic cards, and other media that are not suitable for shredding.
- c. **Electronic records.** Electronic records must be deleted and over-written based on Fort Bend County Information Technology Department destruction procedures.

V. **Suspension of Records Control Schedules.** When it becomes clear that there is a likelihood of litigation, audit, or governmental investigation by or against the County, the department with knowledge of the action shall notify the relevant record holder(s) and the RMO. The RMO shall coordinate with the records holder(s) to identify the location of the relevant records. All regularly scheduled destruction of the records associated with the action must be suspended immediately. To prevent these records from being inadvertently destroyed, a system of destruction holds will be assigned to records subject to these legal constraints by the RMO. Official and transitory records

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<sup>6</sup> [Request to Destroy Scheduled Records](#)

<sup>7</sup> Destruction Request/Attestation

- a. Applying Destruction Holds. Destruction holds must be applied to all repositories that contain relevant records, including any central file rooms, offsite records centers, electronic records repositories, email servers, file servers, and backup tapes throughout the County. Whenever possible, destruction holds should be applied systematically to relevant records using electronic means. The process of applying destruction holds will be periodically reviewed and tested to ensure it is effective in these situations.
- b. Destruction holds are not intended to stop scheduled records destruction permanently. Hold orders shall be lifted as soon as the legal matter has been completed or the requirements of the special circumstances have been fulfilled.

## **Part V: Training**

I. **Training.** The Records Management Department will prepare training materials and schedule ongoing training of existing and replacement RLO's. Previous training materials may be found on the County's INTRANET (econnect) site.<sup>8</sup>

II. **Records.** The Records Management Department will maintain records of all training opportunities made available to County employees through the County records management program.

The Records Management Committee on 1 June 2013 is comprised of Ann Werlein, County Judge's Office, Chair; Nancy Sparrow, Records Management Officer; Paul Stewart, County Attorney's Office; Ed Sturdivant, County Auditor; Ray Webb, Director, Information Technology Department.

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<sup>8</sup> <http://econnect/index.aspx>